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Written statement* submitted by the Jubilee Campaign, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[15 February 2016]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Interactive Dialogue with Special Rapporteur on situation of human rights Islamic Republic of Iran

Human Rights and Freedom of Religion or Belief

Jubilee Campaign would like to provide information concerning egregious human rights conditions perpetrated by the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The enormous lack of religious freedom in Iran is one of Iran's largest downfalls in its human rights record. Widespread human rights violations continue to pervade Iran's government and society. Though Iran is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which ensures freedom of religion under Article 18, Iran continues to use its strict Islamist rule to be intolerant of religions other than Ja'afari Shia Islam. The election of President Rouhani brought hope as he made numerous public statements promising minority groups justice and equal treatment. Unfortunately, these promises have proved entirely empty, and Rouhani's term has, on the contrary, brought increased discrimination to minority religions.

Freedom of Religion or Belief

Iran bases all of its legislation on Islamic teachings, including its constitution which strictly declares Iran to be an Islamist state, so though it provides official status to three minority religions—Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians—these religions must operate within the confines that the Islamic constitution sets. The freedoms that these minorities do receive are very limited and often are not properly regarded by authorities. Because the constitution uses broad phrasing and justifies any ruling that can be supported by Islamic doctrine, authorities regularly take advantage of the law to target and discriminate against religious minorities. Oftentimes, religious minority members are tried under other allegations such as political offenses and security charges, when in reality, the core nature of their arrest is due to their religion.

Discrimination and Persecution of Christians

Despite that Christianity is officially recognized by Iran's government as a minority religion, Christians are among some of the most targeted peoples in Iran, especially those who have previously converted from Islam. All Christian groups and members must be registered with the government. They are then constantly monitored by the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) or the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The MOIS has caused many Christians to flee the country due to intimidation and threats and is known to turn communities away from those who convert to Christianity or preach it to others. Christian churches are forbidden to use the official language of Iran, Farsi, in their services. Their adherence to this law is monitored by government officials.

Christians have been given the freedom of practicing their faith, however, as per the law, proselytizing is strictly forbidden. Because sharing one's faith with others is a key Christian teaching, Christians are therefore restricted from fully exercising their beliefs.

In 2015, at least 90 converts to Christianity were reported as being arrested and imprisoned for their faith. Christians who are detained are often not provided due process. They are sometimes held without receiving a lawyer or even a formal charge, and often their sentences are unjustly elongated. It is also very common for Christians to face both physical and psychological torture while detained as an attempt by authorities to get information or confessions out of them. Furthermore, they can be placed in prison alongside criminals who have been arrested for violent crimes, which threatens the Christians' safety. Finally, while some receive basic medical attention, others are completely denied it. Last November thirteen Christians were arrested in Varamin. Family members were left to worry about the whereabouts of those arrested because authorities did not disclose where they took the Christians.

Discrimination and Persecution of Baha'is

Baha'is are one of the most targeted and vulnerable religious groups in Iran. They receive absolutely no religious rights or legal protection because their faith is not recognized by the government. Baha'is are also ostracized from things such

as education and housing. Over the past couple years, nearly 100 Baha'i-owned businesses have been shut down by the government. This demonstrates the total lack of freedom that Baha'is experience, affecting not only their religious affairs, but every sector of their lives.

In 2015, there were at least 100 Baha'is in prison because of their illegal belief. All Baha'i members are mandated to register with the police. Twenty-four Baha'is were recently arrested for practicing their faith. The government often escalates punishment as not just punishing for illegal religious activity but also as threatening the state. Baha'is, similar to evangelical Christians, are considered a threat to Iran's Islamic-run government. Like Christians, Baha'is also suffer from a lack of due process.

Restrictions and Closure of Religious and Religiously-Affiliated Buildings

After the 1979 Revolution, the government has ceased all approval for the establishment of new churches and has proceeded to do away with many buildings associated with a minority religion including churches and businesses owned by Baha'is.

Tehran has experienced numerous forced church closures. One of those includes Emmanuel Protestant Church, where most of the 13 arrested Christians reported above attended before it was forcibly closed in 2012. Authorities announced in January 2016 that the Chaldean Catholic Church of Tehran, which was illegally confiscated two years ago, is to be turned into a Muslim prayer center. When community members approach the government with complaints over the illegal confiscation of churches such as this one, the government notoriously responds with inaction. Churches that do remain open are monitored by the government with security cameras and are not allowed to operate using the Persian language. House churches, which spread throughout Iran in recent years, have been especially under threat as police often violently raid the homes taking personal items and arresting attendees.

Recommendations:

- Put pressure on Iran to adhere to international standards regarding religious freedom, especially referring to those covenants such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Iran has signed on to.
- Continue requesting that Iran allow the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Situation in Iran and the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief into the country.
- Urge the government to recognize more religious minorities, especially the Baha'i faith, and give them the right to practice their faith, as well as restore their rights in other sectors such as their rights in business and education.
- Call on the government to respect the rights of the religious minorities that have already been recognized by the state. The HRC must condemn the arrests and unfair treatment of those charged because of their religion.
- Require the government to make their constitution and laws more specific so that authorities cannot exploit the law or justify their discrimination of religious minorities based on their interpretation of Islamic teachings.
- Call on the government to release all prisoners who are currently being held on the basis of their religious convictions.